



# "Building" vs "Scaling" - The Brokerage Guide

What's the best scenario for your brokerage?

# This is a complete guide to building a brokerage for growth and expansion from the ground up in 2022.

In this brand-new handbook, we'll cover these topics on how to assemble your business so it's poised to start booming in the future—without overextending yourself in the present

- Setting goals and understanding your path
- Determining your operational structure: automation, outsource, hire, hybrid?
- Finding and hiring new agents
- Onboarding and training those agents for maximum productivity
- Crafting your brand and vision for the future
- And lots more



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## Who is this for?

### You are:

- A current or aspiring real estate broker-owner, or team leader, who wants to understand what systems and practices today will help you grow and scale tomorrow.
- An expert around how to buy or sell real estate in your market, and ready to create a business that's going to help members of your community solve problems and rave about your services—but you aren't sure where to focus your efforts.
- Curious about entrepreneurship and creating a business that lasts, knowing when it's time to grow, when it's time to scale, and how to iterate on what you're already doing well.

### You want:

- To understand how the most lasting brands foster loyalty and engagement with the people in their communities.
- To craft your own brand that reflects your brokerage's priorities and will grow with you.
- To know when it's "safe" to start hiring people and how to decide which staff or agents you should prioritize hiring, and which you can postpone.
- To maximize efficiency by using automation when appropriate, outsourcing work when it makes sense, hiring someone to handle a task, or using a hybrid approach.
- To hire the best agents for the job.
- To train and acclimate them to your brokerage so seamlessly that they consider it their professional home.



## By the end of reading this guide, you will:

- Understand when it's time to grow and when it's time to scale.
- Know how to find the gaps between where you are and where you want to be, and close them.
- Have a sense for when it makes sense to outsource a job, and when you want to have an in-house staff member handle it.
- Know which agents will be most successful at your brokerage, and how to hire them.
- Learn the basics of an effective onboarding and training program, including mentorship.
- Get a sense for how to build a lasting brand that reflects your values and generates attention.



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## Chapter 1

# Deciding It's Time to Take the Plunge

Creating a successful business is an accomplishment in and of itself, no matter its size. So many dream of building a company from the ground up, and very few have the courage to even try—or the discipline to manifest their dream into reality.

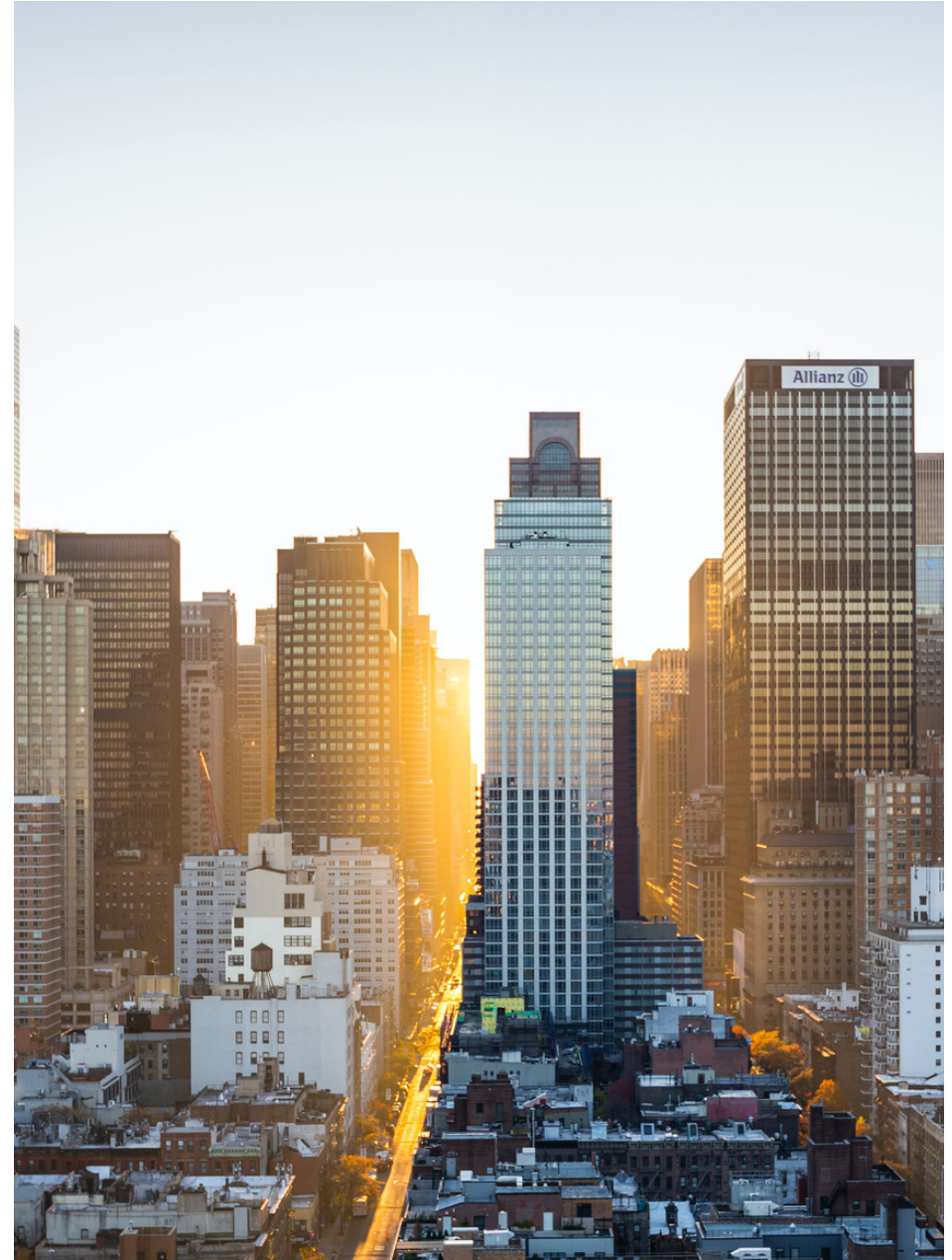
A real estate brokerage is no exception, and if you've managed to capture even some of the share in your local market, that's an accomplishment worth celebrating. But you might be asking yourself: What's next?



**The answer to that question is going to differ depending on your goals, both personally and for your business.**

Some brokers want to get out of sales production entirely. Others might have a specific volume number in mind that they've always wanted to reach. And still others may hope to dominate a higher price point in the market.

We're going to walk you through what you need to know and do to build the brokerage you've always dreamed of operating one day—starting with the vision, then working backward to where you are at this moment, and what **you'll need to do to reach that next level.**



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## Step one: Evaluate where you are today

**Before you can decide how you're going to build your business, you need to take a close look at your current environment and the landscape surrounding you.**

Sit down with the numbers you'll need to assess your situation critically. At the very least, you'll want to have your hands on your technology budget, your financial details, and your staff and agent count. If you're still a broker in production, don't forget to include your own information—it's going to be vital if one of your goals is to get out of production, as well as if your goal is to make your agents just as productive as you are!

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## You'll need the following numbers at your fingertips:

- How much sales volume did your brokerage do this year? Last year?
- How many units or sides did your brokerage work on this year? Last year?
- How many agents do you have working with you? How productive are those agents?
- How many full-time staff members do you have? Part-time?
- What is your average price point for homes bought or sold?
- What does your current toolbox contain in terms of products and services? How much do those cost you today? Are there additional resources you aren't currently taking advantage of, but could be?

Gathering these numbers and laying everything out in clear terms not only helps you assess how your brokerage is doing today and where there might be room for improvement, but it will also give you a clearer idea of who your competition is and how you can dominate your segment of the market.

Step two:

## Look at your competition

**There's no shortage of real estate brokerages in the world, and while that might be frustrating for an up-and-coming broker, it's also an opportunity for you to see what's worked well for others and what might leave some room for improvement.**

Make a list of the brokerages in your area that are your direct competition in one or more of these different variables—then make another list of brokerages in your area that you aren't competing with quite yet, but you want to be on their level.

- Sales volume
- Units or sides
- Number of agents
- Per-agent productivity
- Average price point

If possible, note each variable for each brokerage. Are you noticing any patterns? Maybe the boutique brokerages in your area that you most want to emulate all have a significantly higher average price point than your brokerage does, but a similar or even lower number of agents. Or maybe the sales volume for one brokerage is through the roof, but it also has a lot of primarily unproductive agents doing just a handful of transactions per year.

You don't need to decide whom you want to be when you grow up just yet, but this exercise should help give you some clarity around the kind of brokerage you do not want to accidentally evolve into.

Step three:

## What *is* the next level?

**Ask twenty brokers to define a successful real estate brokerage, and you'll get twenty different answers. When you're just starting out, it's a challenge, naturally ... but in some ways, it's not as hard to begin as it is to advance.**

The reason is that there are some basic things that every brokerage will probably need in order to get up and running at a ground level: a lead generation system, administrative support (including possible transaction management), foundational marketing for listings, and agents. But how you build your brokerage from that point can follow a number of different blueprints. So you'll need to determine what your dream brokerage will look like before you can make the right plans.



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**There are a number of ways you can think about leveling up your brokerage. The trick is to find the metric that's going to mean the most to you and your business, and then laser-focus on that number.**

### **Sales volume**

The total dollar amount of real estate sold by your brokerage in a single year. The most productive agents and brokerages might handle billions of dollars in sales volume each year. One way to increase your revenue is to focus on increasing your sales volume. You can do this by:

- Hiring more agents
- Increasing your average price point
- Making your current agents more productive through scaling

### **Sales units or transaction sides**

The number of deals that your agents close in a single year. Highly productive agents can close more

units or sides than their competition can. Another way to increase your revenue is to focus on increasing the number of units or sides that your agents are tackling. You can do this by:

- Hiring more agents
- Making your current agents more productive through scaling

### **Average price point**

If your brokerage has excelled at the entry-level or move-up home market, but you've yet to really break into the high-end or luxury home segment of your area, then focusing on increasing your average price point can be a way to make more money without necessarily hiring more agents. You can do this by:

- Increasing client satisfaction through scaling
- Making current agents better at their jobs through scaling
- Identifying new products or services that are desirable at higher price points

## Number of productive agents and average agent productivity

Just about every broker dreams about snagging the most productive agent in the area, and it makes a lot of business sense to think about your business in terms of average agent productivity and doing whatever you can to maximize it. The best way to increase agent productivity is:

- Improving current agent performance through scaling

**It might be tempting to choose more than one, but resist the temptation**—oftentimes you might use one or more of these different growth pathways to help you reach your ultimate goal, but they can't all be the holy grail, nor should they be! Pick just one, and make it the bottom line of everything you do for the next year. You can always focus on something new the next time you decide it's time to build.

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### The Boutique Broker's Guide to Delighting Agents and Winning Star Talent

Who is this for? You are:

- A broker**  
who is striving to improve and wants to understand how your competition is operating.
- A team leader**  
who's aspiring to take your business to the next level.
- A real estate agent**  
who's curious about the types of support you might want from your brokerage.

Chapter 7: Getting the deal to the finish line - Transaction management

their coordin... helping out w...  
The transac... from a contra... other brokers... to work perso... and the coord... even as they... transaction is... have monthly... and help the... shifts to the a...

Turn high-quality agent support into a competitive advantage with our [Boutique Broker's Guide to Delighting Agents and Winning Star Talent](#).

[Download it now!](#)

## Step four:

# Identify the gaps

**Now you've got a sense for where you want to go, and you know exactly where you are. It's time to start documenting the gap between the two in as much detail as you can capture so that you can figure out what resources and assets you'll need in order to bridge it.**

You'll want to evaluate the following resources and assets. Ask yourself if you have adequate support to reach your goal—and if you aren't sure, take a look at the competitors you identified in the second step. What does their roster look like, both in terms of agents and staff, and in terms of tools and vendors? If yours looks skinny in one specific area by comparison, that's probably a sign you need to beef it up.

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**Ask yourself the following questions:**

- **Could my current group of agents and staff meet this goal?**

If not, what tools or resources might they need in order to get there? Do I already have any of them? How much will it cost to add those tools, or to purchase the next level of the system we're already using, to make it more efficient?





- **Will I need to hire more agents to reach this goal?**

- What level of expertise will you need from those agents? Can you work with brand-new agents who still need to build their book of business? Or will you need those agents to be seasoned and experienced, with at least a couple of years behind them in real estate?
- How much training do you currently provide to new agents? Is it sufficient to reach that goal?
- How much support do you currently offer all your agents? If you offered more, could they be more productive?
- How competitive are your brokerage offerings for your market? Are your splits higher or lower than your biggest competitor, and how do your resources for agents line up?

- **Will I need to hire more staff members to support the number of agents I have?**

- How many agents can each of your staff members realistically support? From transaction coordinators to compliance specialists, every role is going to have a different capacity—and ideally, you won't want to max them out; it will give you wiggle room for cross-training and support.
- How many more staff members in each position can you hire to help?
- Are there any tools or resources you can secure for staff that will allow them to support more agents?

- **Will I need to open up any new roles to reach this goal?**
  - Whether it's a new management or even director-level position, or you've found a task that you want to outsource (and you've never done it before), you'll also want to think about any new team members that could help support this initiative.
  - Do you have adequate support in:
    - Lead generation?
    - Marketing?
    - Hiring and training?
    - Operations management?
- **Will I need any new tools or resources that I haven't yet started using?**
  - What efficiencies can you introduce to your business that you haven't yet? Are you still manually working with processes that you could have automated already?
  - What's the per-agent cost of those tools and resources, and what's the time benefit? How much of your agents' time could you steal back to focus on production by introducing a new efficiency?

There is probably more than one gap between your goal and where you are today, which means you have several pathways of opportunity to reach your goal. Which one is the best one for you most immediately? To determine that, you'll need to take the final step and assess which you need to do first: grow, or scale.

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**Empowering  
Agents** 



Hosted by  
**Seth Price**

How do you recruit, create  
and retain happy agents?—  
**Watch Empowering Agents  
Live Podcast**

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Step five:

## **Decide if you need to focus on growth or scaling**

We've alluded to both growth and scaling here, and it's important to note: They are not the same thing, nor should they be. It's wise to focus on one at a time—but don't ignore the other one indefinitely! You'll stall out at building your business without paying quality attention to both growth and scaling.



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## Growth

Growth refers to activities that will involve adding new people or products to your business. Growth can and does encompass hiring new agents and staff members (both part-time and full-time), purchasing a new technology system, or other tasks and variables that involve increasing your budget and spending more money. To grow effectively, you'll need to think ahead to where you want to be, and then start staffing and resourcing accordingly.

This can be a very scary place for brokers to be! Often when you're hiring for growth, you might not be entirely sure that you have the money to pay for it, and therefore hesitate to take the step forward. Especially when it comes to support staff, who might not be generating any revenue directly themselves—it's entirely understandable that you wouldn't want to hire someone without being certain you can retain them indefinitely. We'll discuss some ways to think about hiring for growth in the chapter on hiring.



## Scaling

Scaling, on the other hand, does not involve hiring anybody new, or finding money in your budget for a new line item. Scaling refers to finding the existing efficiencies in your business and iterating on them to make everybody more efficient. It might mean using a staff member to accomplish a task they're well-qualified to do, but was being outsourced to a part-time employee, or the agents are tackling it (probably poorly!). It might mean additional training on the systems and tools that you are already using in your brokerage, so that you can ensure you're wringing every last drop of effectiveness from it. Or it might mean automating a process that's been manually implemented up to this point, to free up time and energy for other tasks.

**The other steps should help guide you to an answer—and remember, you want to switch up your tactics to reach your goal. Growth might be the first thing you want to work on in order to increase your average price point, but at a certain point, adding more agents or staff isn't going to be very effective; rather, making those agents more effective and increasing your customer service offerings will be the path of least resistance.**



## Chapter 2

# Automation, Outsourcing, In-House Hire?

The systems that you set up in your brokerage are going to be mission-critical for accomplishing your goals long-term. As a younger business, you won't be able to afford to buy every version of software and all the products you see advertised as "game-changing"—but you're definitely going to have to invest in at least some technology in order to keep pace with your competition. Choosing your products wisely today and building a system that works can save you untold dollars down the road.

**Lead generation marketing, and transaction management are the primary areas where real estate brokerages will have to make decisions about which tools to use and how to integrate them into the business.**

## Generally speaking, brokerages able to grow and scale successfully and painlessly do so by following this philosophy:

- Automate wherever possible. If it's "so simple anyone could do it," then perhaps it's time to automate it and free up your human resources for tasks requiring critical thinking.
- Find and use software products that allow you to multitask. For example, if your website builder allows you to automate creating a listing page every time an agent in your brokerage secures a new listing, that's fantastic. And if it can also provide a writer for a blog post when you have a stack of ideas but no time to find someone to write them—even better!
- Designate a staff member as your human in-house expert or "keeper of the keys" for every software product you use. Ask your vendors what kind of customer support they offer, and check with the staff member to ensure it's adequate and they're getting what they need.
- Create onboarding experiences and ongoing education, mentorship, and growth opportunities for your agents, especially ones who are new to the industry.




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# Lead generation and marketing

How are your leads finding you, and what pathways are you using to direct them to make a decision to list a house with you, or to hire you as a buyer's agent? We've covered lead generation in-depth elsewhere; as a boutique brokerage with an eye toward scaling, you'll want to make sure that you have solid systems set up that all your agents can easily follow.

Remember that you'll want to have enough leads coming in to distribute to new agents, and one of the growth rules is to hire people only after you have enough leads to keep everybody "fed," so to speak. You will also want to create systems for your agents to create and pursue their own leads, encouraging them to be as "self-sustaining" as possible so that you can hire more new agents and keep the cycle going.

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**Chapter 5**  
**A new frontier: Digital lead-generation tactics that are perfect for real estate agents**

**Facebook Ads**  
Facebook has become one of the most powerful ways to reach consumers of all kinds, including in real estate. It's the most-visited social media network, with 2.53 billion monthly active users and 1.66 billion daily active users as of December 31, 2019; YouTube, the next-most-visited, has about 200 billion monthly active users. With so many people visiting Facebook every day, there are undoubtedly buyer and seller leads in your market browsing the platform right now. And you know they'll come back tomorrow, too. The granular targeting options available in Facebook are what make this such a powerful tool for real estate agents. Make sure you know how you're going to target by:

- Interests
- Behaviors
- ZIP code
- Age range
- Income
- Homeownership status
- Likelihood to move
- Behaviors (prior purchases and device use, for example)
- Connections (do they know someone you know, or have they liked or followed you?)

**Facebook Daily Active Users (DAUs)**  
In millions

Year	US & Canada	Europe	Asia-Pacific	Rest of world	Total
2011	281	151	148	120	699
2012	327	162	179	131	800
2013	384	188	216	151	939
2014	441	211	251	171	1,074
2015	498	231	291	191	1,211
2016	555	251	331	211	1,358
2017	612	271	371	231	1,503
2018	669	291	411	251	1,622
2019	726	311	451	271	1,759

**Don't have a real estate lead-generation strategy yet ... or have one that's not working well for you? Here's where to get started.**

[Learn more](#)

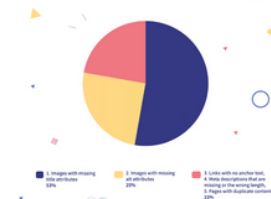


## How to Dominate SEO for Real Estate

### Optimizing images

Google's algorithm doesn't just crawl the copy and code on the page; it also "looks" at the images (or, at least, the image file names, alt attributes and tags, captions, and domain storage details). A study of on-page SEO found that the most common issues by far were image-related, more than all other types of issues combined.

#### The Five Most Common On-Page SEO Issues



High-quality, attractive, intensely local images are a great way for real estate agents to boost their page rankings if they also make sure those images are appropriately optimized. This means the images should include:

- Descriptive, keyword-rich file names
- Descriptive, keyword-rich alt attributes or alt tags
- Appropriate caption text

It's easy to upload image after image to your website without paying attention to those image attributes, but you're losing a ton of potential traffic when you do. The more descriptive you can be (and the more closely you can adhere to your keyword), the higher Google will rank your images.

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Discover tricks to get your website to the top of search engine rankings for relevant keywords and phrases.

[Learn more](#)

Providing your agents with a CRM (at least a basic one) is critical so that they can keep track of their own leads—and so you can support them in that effort. Agent support managers who know the CRM software inside and out can pull reports to see which people haven't been contacted in weeks or months (or ever), and even which leads might be most likely to make a decision soon, and prompt your agents to reach out and say hello.

**In addition to a CRM, at the very least, you'll need a website, some social media presence, and a strategy for how to get traffic or eyeballs to these areas. That might include SEO or building an email list or blogging, or even publishing a print magazine.**

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# Transaction management

Handling contracts, keeping track of earnest money and where the timeline is on any contingencies, and ultimately ushering a home sale transaction across the finish line—these are things agents have to do regularly, and although every transaction is different, the rule still applies: If you can automate it, you should.

When an agent submits a sales contract that's been signed by both buyer and seller, is there a clear process for what happens next? Who reviews the contract to ensure there are no idiosyncrasies that might later hang up the deal? Who ensures that an escrow account has been opened, and earnest money requested or sent? How is everyone kept on the same page about where the contract is, including the buyers and sellers?



Transaction management software can (and should) answer all these questions for you and more. A quality platform, combined with lead generation and marketing support, should mean that you need to hire fewer ISAs to help with this side of the business, saving money (and human resources) for the areas where they're needed most.

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## Chapter 3

# Who's On the Bus? Hiring Agents for Growth

**Now that you've decided which bottom-line metric to focus your business on, you'll need to consider whether you have enough agents to reach that goal. If not, then you'll need to hire some more!**

**You'll need to determine whether you need to set up any hiring systems and processes that don't yet exist at your brokerage.**

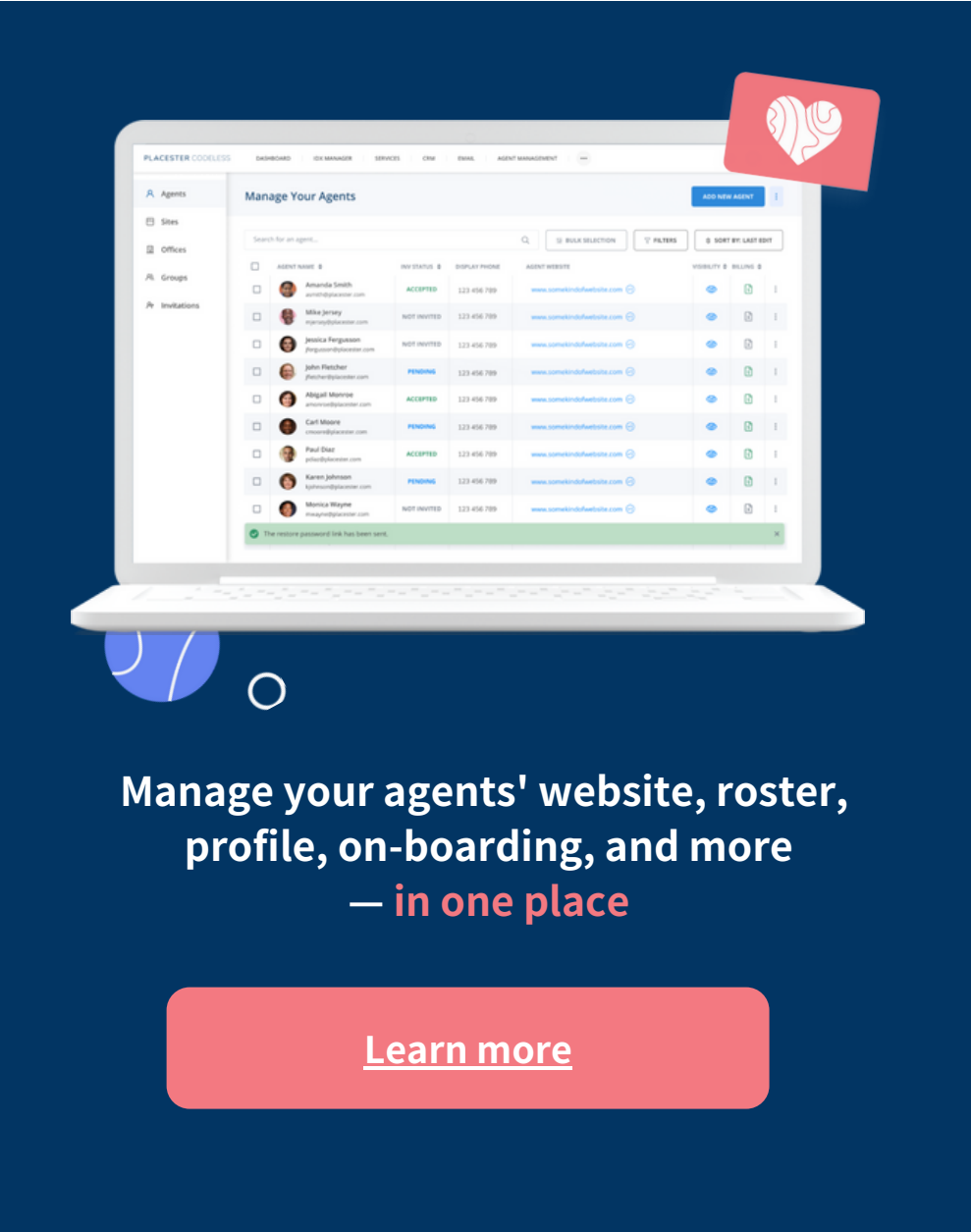
Those might include a recruiting system, creating applications (and knowing which questions to ask), an interview process, onboarding and training ... it's possible there's a lot you're missing. That's okay; everybody has to start somewhere. The big mistake is assuming that hiring is going to take care of itself if you just "find the right people"—it's possible the "right people" might not want to stay with you if their experience isn't that great!

**Before any of that, though, it's important to ask yourself whether your business can currently support agents coming in the door.**

Of course, those agents will ideally be bringing some business with them, but especially the newer agents are going to need some support through brokerage-generated leads.

So before you get started hiring new agents, it's critical to determine how much support you can offer.

You want to make sure that you can provide what you promise when it comes to helping those agents reach their financial goals!



**Manage your agents' website, roster, profile, on-boarding, and more — in one place**

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# What agents will help you to grow (and scale) effectively? What will they need from you?

Some brokers like to refer to personality types when making decisions about whom to hire. Others want to focus on the number of years that an agent has been operating; if they've been working in real estate successfully for at least three, then the odds are good that they've found their calling and can be counted on to last several more. Still more prefer newer agents!

**Almost every broker agrees that their agents need to be hungry for business and to want to work any leads they're given —as well as eager to become more self-sufficient and keep more of their money by generating their own leads and solidifying their sphere of influence.**

Right now, it's important for you to have a sense for how much business your ideal (and average) agent will be bringing to your brokerage, and how many brokerage-generated leads they'll need in order to meet their financial goals. Do you have enough leads to accommodate the new agents?



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It's also wise to refer back to your bottom-line goal and ask yourself whether you'll require more seasoned agents to accomplish it, or whether a fresh face in the business would be better—or a mix of the two. If your goal is to increase your average price point, then it's possible that newer agents might not have the market expertise to help you nail that down. And if your focus is to increase your per-agent productivity—you really want to make sure that every person you bring on board is going to help, not hinder.

If your bottom-line focus is to increase the number of sales or transaction sides that you're working on, that's different ... and the focus might be different for each of those! Seeking out and onboarding less-experienced agents would make more sense if you were focusing on sides instead of sales.

**If the answer is no, then you'll have to fix that problem before you hire any new agents. It's likely that instead of growing your brokerage, focusing on making your lead generation systems more efficient and lucrative is the better way to reach your goal; when your pipeline can accommodate more agents than you have working for you, it's definitely time to start bringing more on board.**

**If the answer is yes, then you're ready to start recruiting!**



## Finding the agents you want to bring on board

**This is such a critical part of building your brokerage that some brokers strive to devote most of their time here, treating it much like working a sphere of influence as an agent ... because it's not as simple as poaching the top agent from your competition.**



Brokers who focus on recruiting make sure to add any agent who might be qualified to their database, keep track of who might be ready to make a change soon, and reach out with softer touches once every month or so. Some brokers might even create real estate newsletters and success tips pertinent to their market and add agents to their mailing list as their contact database expands.

Recruiting platforms that specifically look for real estate agents to join your brokerage can be another way to make sure you're always filling your pipeline with possible people to help you buy and sell houses at *your* brokerage. Asking your current agents to refer other agents they think would fit (and offering a referral bonus if that agent ends up signing on with you) can be another way to find people.

# Applying and interviewing for the job

Another important hiring component is an application. It might seem like overkill. On the flip side, you want to work with agents who are excited to be joining your outfit and who will fit well culturally with the other agents there in terms of collaboration and cooperation, whatever that means for your brokerage. If someone isn't excited enough to answer a few basic questions about why they want to work with you and what they already know about you, then that's a good indication they might not be an amazing fit.

**You don't need to overthink your application, but you should definitely create one, as well as an interview process.**

## What questions should you ask on the application?

- Why do you want to work here? (This one should definitely be on every application; in fact, it's perfectly fine if it's the only one you ask—but make sure you get an answer!)
- What do you want from your current broker that isn't being provided to you?
- How do you define success in your business?
- What are your goals for the next year? Five years?



Leave the questions open-ended and allow as much space as the respondent wants to fill—you will be surprised by how much you learn about your applicants, and if they can't be bothered to share (or aren't that excited), then you'll be able to pick up on that pretty quickly, too.

**One interview will give you one person's perspective;** brokerages who focus on hiring for bottom-line goals like per-agent productivity typically will ask agents to talk to at least two, or as many as four, people before they are officially asked to join the brokerage.

The recruiter is usually the first to interview agents—even a casual chat is an interview! They might have several such “interviews” with the same agent over months or even years before moving them on to the next stage in the interview process.

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because the agent isn't ready yet ... but will be eventually. (There are genuinely many parallels between working with buyers and sellers and hiring agents!)

After the agent has spoken to the recruiter, a director of agent services or agent success (if you have one) or your most senior agent manager (if you don't) should weigh in. Some brokerages like to set this up as a surprise call; they'll let the agent know that someone will be checking in about their interest but will deliberately *not* schedule it so that they can see how the agent responds on their toes.



And then at least one face-to-face interview with another senior manager or executive is a good idea; someone from the operations side is typically an excellent choice for this final round, and if you can involve another staff member to see how the agent treats them and interacts with them, that's even better. A marketing coordinator or assistant who regularly helps agents with their requests can often be the last line of defense against red-flag behavior that might get shelved in proximity to other job titles.

**When all the interviews are complete, have an official debrief process. What does everyone think? Is it a fit, or not?**

If you decide it's not a fit at any point, be kind and let the agent know that you're not going to be moving forward with them. It's likely they aren't going anywhere, so you (or one of your other agents!) may be facing them across a transaction table at some point in the future. It will be less awkward if you are direct now!



## Chapter 4

# Onboarding and Training: Start New Hires Off Running

**You've created your systems. You've hired your agents. Now your work is all done—right?**

Not exactly! Leaving your agents out to dry while they figure out what goes where isn't going to be great for your retention, and the more good agents stay with you long-term, the better off you'll be long-term. This is one big reason why we've suggested having an in-house staff expert for every product or service you use: You can use those experts to train your agents on best practices, setting them up for success.

Onboarding your new agents and training them on your systems and setups so that they feel able to hit the ground running is key. The more comfortable they feel, the faster they'll become productive, integrated team members.

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## Make them feel welcome early

After you've officially asked them to join your brokerage, but before they start their first day, send over a "welcome" packet—ideally, one that includes both swag and fun stuff for the agent, an itinerary for their onboarding and training, plus any paperwork you're going to need filed with the state in order to transfer their license over to you.

When you get the licensing paperwork out of the way early, you ensure that your new agents are going to be able to start working with you immediately. Their first day at work can be a productive one if they don't have to wait for the official blessing to get started. Even if they're a brand-new agent with no experience or established network (yet), this gives everyone the opportunity to hit the ground running.



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**Make sure your agents know where to send their completed paperwork (as in, which staff member is going to handle filing it for you), and when you expect them to finish it. That way they won't be surprised if and when you nudge them with a reminder.**

Many agents get excited over a simple branded T-shirt; shows that you care enough to give them something. That said: Try to think beyond the ubiquitous T-shirts to items that you know agents will use repeatedly. Some options might include:

- Coffee mugs or tumblers
- Water bottles
- Pullovers or zip-up hoodies
- Face masks and hand sanitizer
- Tote bags
- Windshield sun shades
- Umbrellas
- Pens and notepads
- Stickers
- Socks
- Power banks
- Portable speakers
- Tech-related items (a Tile, a phone wallet)

Don't feel like you have to include everything on the list—but try as best you can to put together a swag bag or box that the recipient will feel delighted to open. And think about what items might be popular regionally or with your other agents so you can make it a customized experience for your brokerage and this agent in particular.

The itinerary is also important; it tells your new agents that you have a plan for them, and exactly what that plan is, including the pace at which you expect them to learn and adapt to new systems.



# Give them a road map for what to expect

**Include the itinerary in their gift basket, but don't expect them to save it and laminate it! Email it to them, also, and print out another hard copy to hand them on their first day.**

The itinerary is their guide for their first few weeks at your brokerage. It will explain to them when they can expect to learn what.

What else can you include in your itinerary? Think about the questions your agents ask you over and over again, and see if you can answer them in an onboarding packet that includes the itinerary as well as answers to questions like:

- Who's in charge of what? (An organizational chart should explain this nicely.)
- What's the brokerage address? How do I get in the building?
- How do I get set up with my email?
- Where do I order business cards?
- What non-training-related meetings can I expect? When do they take place? What's discussed?

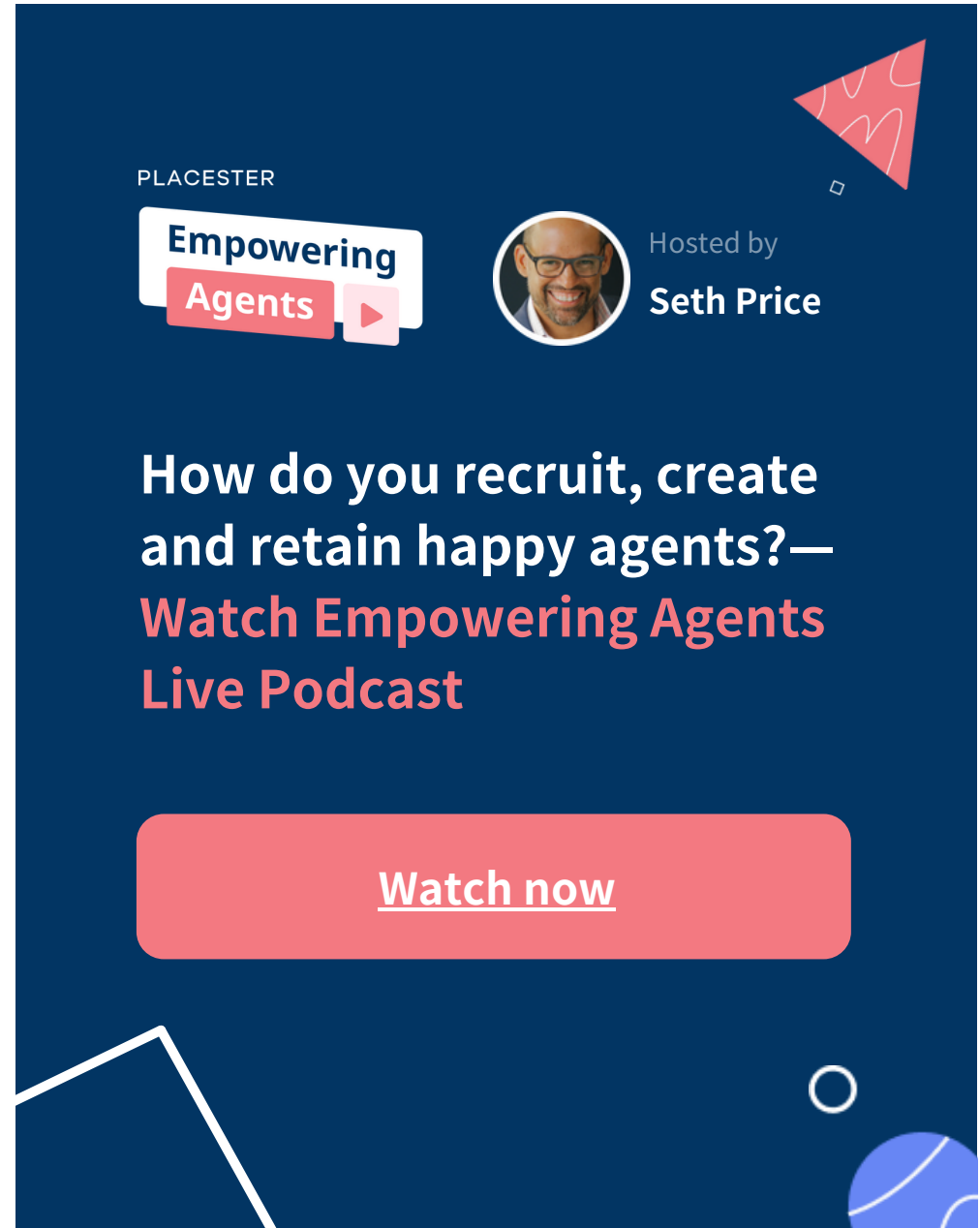


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**Talk to your agents about expectations, too. Many of them might come from brokerages where things that you consider important were always downplayed, or optional.**

“We won’t waste your time in our weekly meetings—if we finish discussion early, then everyone gets the rest of the time back—but there are important market discussions and sometimes legal or compliance issues that we talk about during those times, and if you don’t attend, you might miss vital information about how we’re writing contracts or setting up earnest money,” for example.

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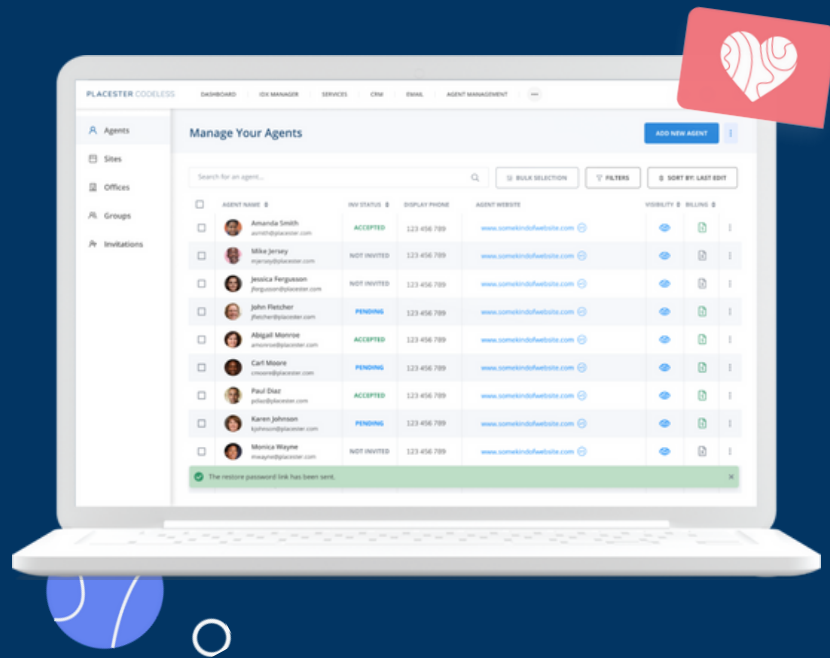
## Leverage your in-house software experts

Your agents will need to be trained on how to use the different tools and resources at the brokerage, and onboarding is the perfect time to explain how it's done. Some brokerages like to create a sort of "training manager" position, with one person who understands the entire process from start to finish and who will be doing most of the actual hands-on training. This can work very well if your training manager is also a systems and software expert and can answer any questions your agents might have about why you do things this way or why you've chosen one product over another.

In other brokerages, the in-house experts for different tools and systems will take time out of their day or week to train new agents on how they expect them to use those tools and systems. This might

seem like a huge imposition, but depending on how many agents you're onboarding at once, you can set up a calendar or schedule that gives your experts the opportunity to train several agents at once.

Think about this when you're creating the in-house experts for different programs. These experts don't necessarily have to be the most senior or experienced people on their team or in their department, but they do need to know everything there is to know about the tools themselves. Ideally, they'll be your troubleshooter and point person for any time something goes wrong; this will teach your experts more about each platform than they likely need to know.



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For all these reasons, it makes sense for your in-house expert to be someone who uses the software consistently and almost constantly.

A transaction manager would be a fantastic choice for teaching agents about your transaction software. Your marketing manager or director can likely explain how the website vendor, social media services, and other marketing-related tools are used and deployed at the brokerage. Don't throw all these responsibilities in the lap of your tech support team —although realistically, they might be the best people to talk about one or two products.

Ask your experts if there are any hands-on tasks that agents can do to help them learn these platforms and understand how they work. This will be trickier with tools like transaction management, unless you have a training setting, because you don't want agents in training working on actual deals until they



know what they're doing. But they can definitely start putting together their agent pages on your website! Especially if there's a human resource there to explain how the branding works and what customization is possible within the parameters of your setting.

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## Create a mentorship program

Realistically, one broker cannot provide intense and significant oversight for multiple agents; at a certain point, they're going to be stretched too thin and start dropping balls. Using seasoned agents to help mentor and train new agents to success is a tactic that many successful brokers have used to help distribute the burden of training, and it's one that can serve you extremely well if you choose the right mentors and get their buy-in on how much support (and reward) is sufficient for the work put in.

Typically, a mentor is a more experienced agent who will oversee a certain number of a newer agent's transactions (say, the first 10, or even 20), or will help handle all transactions over a certain time period (perhaps six months, perhaps a year). The mentor agent will get a portion of the commission for any sales they help oversee, which incentivizes them to actually help these newer agents close as many deals as they can.

Mentors should be paired with newer agents as soon as possible, but ideally, this should not be a scenario where you're forcing two people to become a team. The mentor should opt into the program, and you as the broker need to ask yourself if this agent is truly ready to be a mentor. How are their sales? Do they seem to have the capacity or bandwidth to help? What's their motivation for joining the program? ("More money" is fine, but hopefully they have another reason in addition!)

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It's also wise to give newer agents some choice or say in who their mentor is. Consider showing the agent several options for someone who could mentor them, sharing a few details about who they are personally (a friendly connection makes working together much easier!), and allowing the new agent to choose their mentor from the selections you've offered. Giving both agents some choice ultimately helps forge a stronger relationship.

Set your expectations clearly for both your mentor and your mentee. This isn't just a sales relationship; you should expect your mentors to be working with your mentee to make sure they are establishing good habits and enjoying their time at your brokerage. Do you want the mentor and mentee pairs to meet? How often? Once-a-week touch-bases to make sure the new agents don't have any outstanding questions and the mentors feel like they know where their new agents are and what their needs might be, are always a good idea.

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Another best practice is to create a space for mentors to talk to each other, troubleshoot problems, or share any victories with their mentees. Workspaces that use chat systems like Slack might create a private Slack channel just for mentors, asking questions periodically and encouraging mentors to weigh in with their experiences. An in-person mentor meeting group can also be a good idea.

Above all, appreciate your mentors! Sure, they're getting compensated, but they're also helping you grow and taking time away from their own leads and business to lay the groundwork for your brokerage's future. Custom swag that's exclusive to the mentor program—stickers, hats, tees, and so on—can go a long way toward making your mentors feel special.



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## Ask for feedback, now and later

**Your onboarding and training programs should be considered works in progress, not carved in stone. The first iteration of your program is guaranteed to miss something, potentially something huge, about the way your brokerage operates.**

This is very normal! And if you think of your program as flexible, you can shift and shape it to accommodate the things you're missing.

How will you know what those things are? Ask your brand-new agents who are currently going through the program if there's anything they expected to learn that isn't being covered. And make a point to follow up with each group of new agents (or each individual new agent) one month, three months, and six months after they've finished their training.

At those points, agents should have some idea of how your brokerage operates, getting more and more acclimated as time passes. The things they will offer as suggestions for training modules at six months probably won't be similar to the ones your one-month agents are suggesting, and that's intentional. If you ping agents periodically while they're learning the ropes at your brokerage, they'll be better able to explain exactly what they don't know and had to learn on the fly.

Should you automatically insert any agent suggestions or recommendations into your training program? Not necessarily. You may be covering the topic adequately, but a handful of agents simply aren't picking it up; maybe you can do something to elevate that module and make it more memorable. But if several agents repeatedly tell you that they wish they had been given more time to learn X during training, that's a big signal that your program could use a little refresh.

**If you can, ask some of your mentors to go through the training modules, too. They don't have to follow it exactly but sending experienced agents to watch the same videos and follow the same guidelines as your brand-new agents should generate a plethora of suggestions and tweaks that will make your onboarding experience even better.**



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## Chapter 5

# Creating A Brand That Lasts

Your brand is how your customers recognize “you” (or your brokerage) instantly—and ideally without wholly realizing exactly how or why they’ve identified a piece of advertising or social media banner as yours.

The most famous brands evoke a specific feeling or emotion when you see a logo or an advertisement style that immediately evokes the company and what it represents. The best examples are also some of the biggest companies in the world: Coca-Cola, Nike, Apple, to name a handful. When you see the Nike “swoosh” on an ad, or the minimalist styling of an Apple billboard, you know what’s being sold to you even if there are few or no products in the image or video.



If you've been working with a franchisor and are just now going independent, or if an indie approach was your intention from the start, then you may be tempted to try to build a brand a la Nike or Apple or Coca-Cola right out the gate ... and although that's a lofty goal, remember that those brands took decades to lay the foundation of emotion and association that will inspire a lightning-fast connection between, for example, the phrase "athletic shoes" and the broader concepts of pushing yourself to your limits, achieving your goals, and becoming better than you were yesterday.

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You'll also want to think about the future when you're building your brand. A brand that's very specific to one local area won't necessarily translate to the surrounding metro landscapes and even states—for example, a brand that evokes a college or university that's a big draw in your area, or even a daffodil-yellow effort that's really cute and well-known in Daffodil City, but doesn't make a ton of sense outside the region.

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**Maybe you don't want to expand today, but rebranding tomorrow because you didn't consider the possibility can be expensive, and sometimes not all that effective. After you've spent years trying to associate your brand with a certain "look," your clients might find the affiliation too strong to shake.**

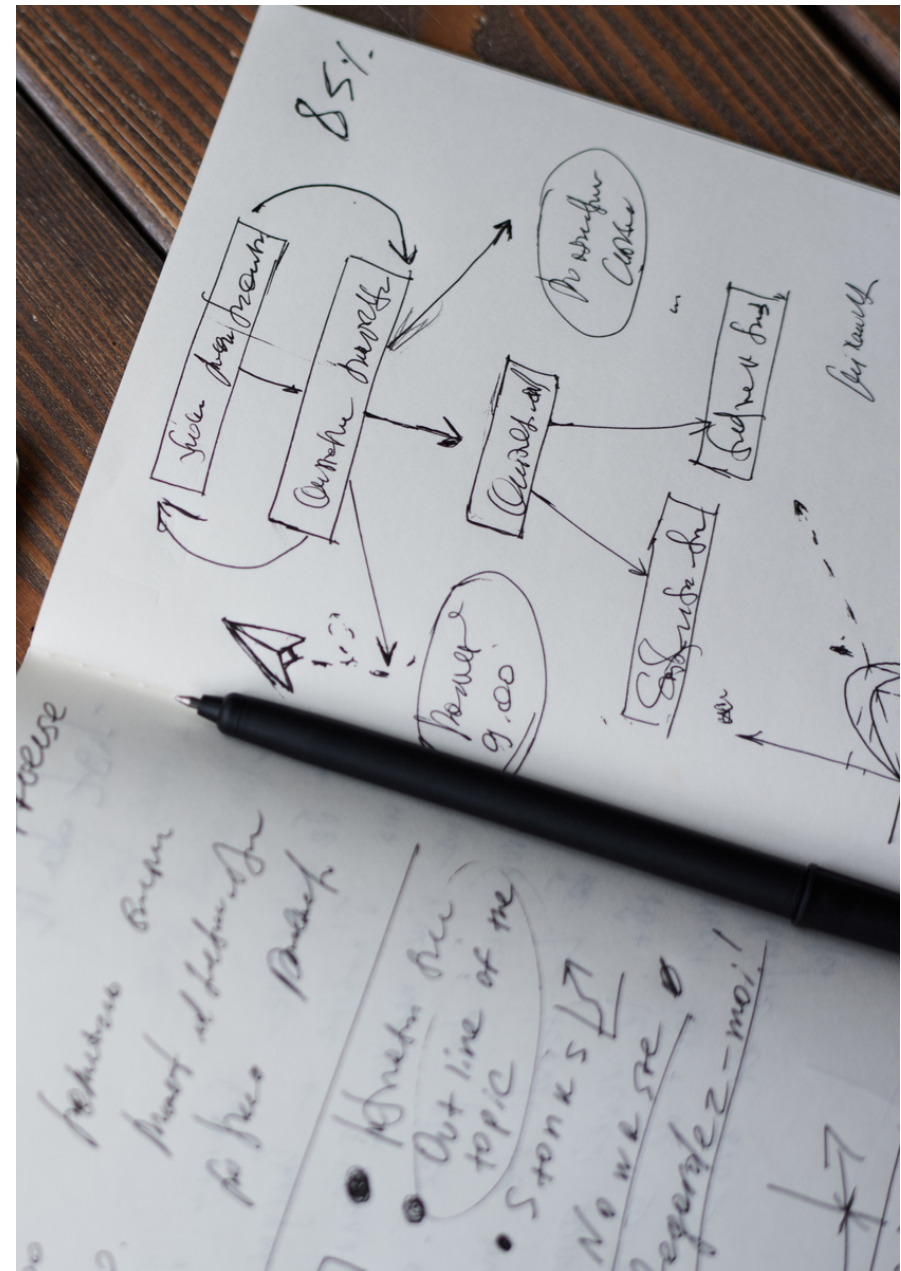
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There are a few different things to consider when you're putting a brand together for longevity and expansion. A branding expert or consultant can also help you understand how different components of your brand work together to create a cohesive effect that starts to produce strong associations in the minds of your brand targets, how to iterate on your brand for individual agents or teams within your brokerage, how to tweak (but not reinvent) your brand when you expand to a new market, and more.

If you don't feel comfortable or confident around your brand strategy and creation, and you're not sure where to turn, many vendors (Placester is one!) offer services and support that can help you understand the decisions you need to make and which path will work best for you.

**Ready to get started? Ask yourself these questions about your business and what you represent.**

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## Who are you?

Ideally, you'll know more about yourself than a straight list of likes and dislikes—though that actually is not a bad place to start, especially when it comes to aesthetics! If there are certain colors or styles that you know just don't speak to who you are (or that look terrible on you), feel free to eliminate them from your brand options.

You'll be surrounded by your brand, if not literally wearing it; some brokers like to build a deliberate wardrobe that coordinates with and reflects their brand identity. You should be not only comfortable with the brand but eager to immerse yourself in it. So it should be something that really does reflect who you are, whatever that means.

Maybe you're known for a quirky style choice, such as your glasses frames, bow ties, a certain brand of

shoe, a color you sport frequently or constantly. Even if your style is more classic and understated, that in and of itself is a statement that speaks to the clients who want to work with someone like you! Instead of going with the brighter colors or funkier designs of someone who owns "quirky" as a badge of honor, you might be more comfortable with neutrals and understated (but undeniable) elegance.

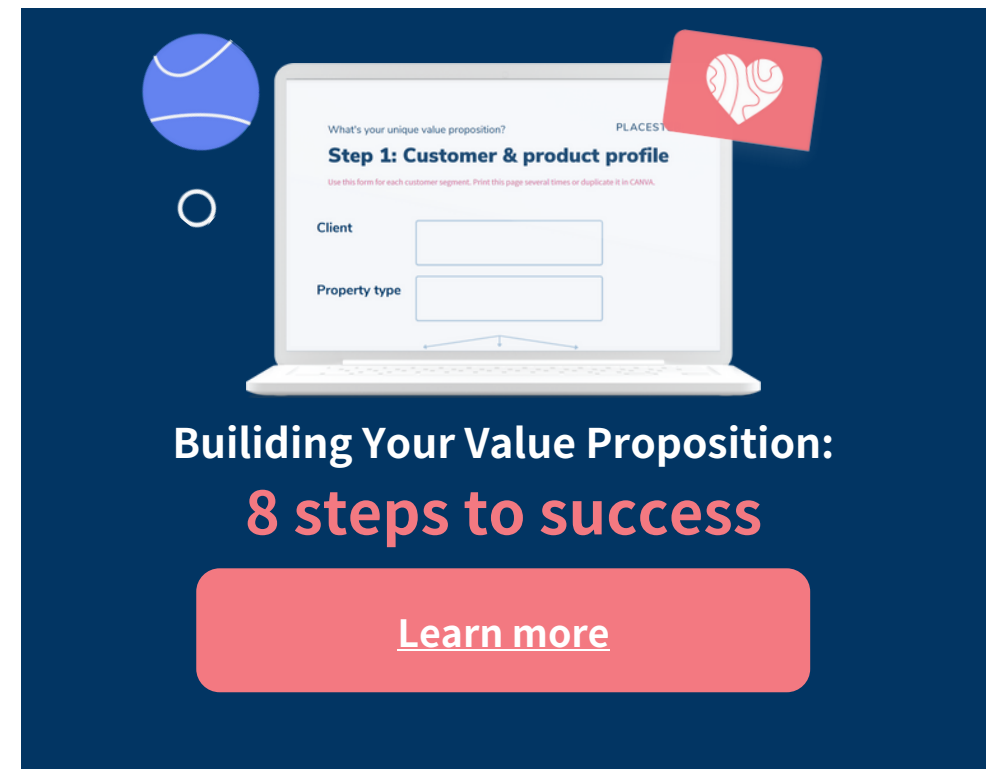


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## Beyond the personal style choices that you like and dislike, you could ask yourself additional questions to try to get to the root of “you.”

- Where did I grow up? Do I still identify with that place or area? Is it relevant to my current market?
- Where do I live now? Why did I move there? What communities have I joined?
- What do I do for fun or in my spare time? What’s important to me? (Sports, crafting, family activities, animals or pets, cars, fitness, church or mindfulness, nature and the outdoors—you know how you like to spend your time when you aren’t selling houses!)
- Why is real estate important to me, and why did I want to get into the profession?
- Do I have a favorite type or style of home?
- Is there anything else I would want a stranger to know about me?

This is your professional face that you’re putting forward, so think about the fun facts you’d share with a stranger at a cocktail party or while sharing an airplane row. You don’t need to get too intimate and specific, but you need to provide a general sense of the kind of person. It might even be a helpful activity to draw a picture of how you see yourself or try to find a character in a movie or book that you think is a good representation. (But that’s extra credit.)



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Client

Property type

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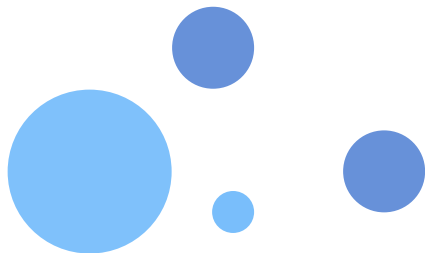
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# What do you stand for?

**Beneath the layer of who you are is a deeper layer around your true self: It encompasses what is meaningful to you and what you'd be willing to take a stand for (or against, as the case may be).**

People like to work with people like them, which sometimes means shared values. You don't need to display your political affiliations or announce your stance on volatile issues like abortion—but figuring out what you stand for vis-a-vis your real estate career is a worthwhile exercise.



**For example, how important are the following concepts or philosophical ideas to you?**

- The notion of a free market
- Equal access to housing
- Building wealth through homeownership and real estate investment
- Increasing affordable options for first-time buyers
- Innovative building tools and techniques
- Energy-efficient or “green” housing
- Community-building
- Freedom from government oversight and overreach
- Grassroots legislation and leadership
- Independence in a business setting

All of those concepts touch on real estate to a greater or lesser degree and you don't necessarily need to make them a big, braying part of your brand identity. However, suppose you're all-in on the concept of affordable housing and increasing opportunities for first-time buyers. In that case, a brand that oozes wealth, luxury, and disposable or expendable income is probably not an excellent fit for your target market, which is a group of humans struggling to buy a house.

On the flip side, if you're personally heavily sold on the concept of a completely free market, and a seller's ability to accrue wealth through real estate, then a gritty, edgy brand that promotes individuality and personal expression over business acumen is also probably not going to appeal to your target market.



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# What kind of clients do you represent?

**If you haven't already sketched out the type of client that you typically represent—or want to represent in your market—then it's time to do that, and assess whether your own evaluation of who you are and what you stand for is a good match for the clients you're serving.**

Start by asking yourself where most of your clients are in their homeownership journey. Are they aspiring first-time buyers or condo-owners who are hoping to expand their footprints and want to sell a condo while buying a house? Are they existing homeowners who are growing their families and need another bedroom soon? Are they retirees who are ready to downsize?

Beyond the basics, you can likely pinpoint other commonalities that many of your clients share. Perhaps they're relocating from a city or town in the next county or state—or even across the nation—and they've just discovered the appeal of the region where you hang your real estate license. Some agents and brokers make an excellent living by catering to clients who work in specific industries, such as tech, industrial production, media, or other career paths.

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**Try to categorize all your clients by a number of different variables (a CRM is excellent for this task) and see where you have the highest percentages of successful sales. Some examples:**

- Life stage
- Income (approximate)
- Career, company, and job title
- Hobbies and community connections (schools, sports teams, and so on)
- Previous connection to the area
- Anything else you can think to document

You might not find any significant patterns, but then again, you might be surprised by what you learn about your clients and how similar (or not) they are to each other and to you.

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# What homes (or types of homes) have you helped people buy or sell?

**Finally, it's time to get down to the brass tacks (or foundation and drywall-hanging) of what it is you do for a living: You work with homes, helping people buy and sell them.**

Before you start working on your brand, it's time to ask yourself whether you have expertise in any types of homes, architectural styles, or locations that you might be able to allude to by using your brand. Gather together some details about the homes you've helped people buy or sell (or both), and then answer a few more questions to get you thinking:

- What year were the homes built? Do you see any strong patterns in terms of decade or era?
- What price point have you typically worked with in the past? Do you want your brand to reflect that and continue on that trend, or do you want to aim higher?
- Where are the homes located? You can use a platform like Google Maps to scatter pins in neighborhoods and give you a strong visual image. Is there a specific development, group of blocks, or region where you can claim expertise (because it's true!)? Pay close attention to whether those homes follow any non-neighborhood patterns—are they located along a waterfront that spans several neighborhoods, a commuter corridor that lots of employed parents tend to use, a specific school or park or community feature?

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- Do you see any patterns in terms of types of homes architectural style? Maybe you're a mid-century modern expert and you never knew it! Or maybe you already understood that the local Victorian homes are not easy to move, and you're one of the few agents who knows how to appeal to the qualified buyers who've always dreamed of owning one. There are plenty of agents who make a killing by specializing in downtown condos, too, for example.
- What about the basics—how big the homes are, the average number of bedrooms and bathrooms, the price per square foot, whether there's a pool or a garden? Are there multiple main suites for multigenerational households? If you've helped a client or two with special needs buy a house that was perfect for them, are there more who might want similar help, and can you iterate on that?



**This might seem like a lot of self-exploration for something as seemingly insignificant as your brand, but you want it to truly represent who you are today, as well as grow with you if you expand to new offices or even new markets.**

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# How do you articulate all that...without words?

**The bad news (which is also good news) is that there is no formula to create a brand that is definitely going to work for you and your brokerage. Brands key into emotions and past experiences, and a brand that's a perfect fit for one company is going to seem wildly inappropriate at another.**

If you don't have design experience yourself, or you don't have someone already working to create your brand, then this is the time to bring in some outside help. You can start searching for "marketing and branding experts" in your area, or "real estate brand builders" on Google—but be aware that branding is typically a rather expensive activity and the branding

experts are going to sit you down and run you through the exercises you just did for yourself. An alternative is to use a designer or a vendor you already work with and ask whether they provide branding support and services. If you can come to the table with a few ideas about what it is that you represent and how your market operates, then you shouldn't need a full-on branding doctor to address your brokerage's needs.

**There are many components that collectively make a brand. You should consider creating guidelines around all of them—a real brand is nothing without consistency!**

## Color

One of the most critical pieces of your brand is the color palette that you use. Most brands will choose two to three primary colors that always are included in any branding effort, and then a number of secondary colors that complement the primary color. That way if one of your agents or designers is looking for a red or blue shade to include in an ad, they'll have options available to them that are already part of the brand experience, and look seamless as a result.

Certain colors do tend to connote certain feelings or emotions, but there are really no wrong answers when it comes to the color that represents your brand, as long as it makes sense for the brand. Pastel colors might not be the best choice for a Wyoming brokerage selling ranches, but it could be perfect for an independent outfit in Miami that specializes in condos close to nightlife. Black silver

and white can seem imposing and make a strong statement, which might be super-appropriate for a luxury brokerage, and not make a lot of sense for one that helps mostly first-time buyers.

If you're planning on evoking your brand literally by wearing the brand colors as often as possible, then your own personal taste should factor in as well. Don't choose yellow as one of your primary brand colors if you truly can't stand it. If vibrant jewel tones make your secretly Goth heart weep, use more neutrals and tone things down.



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## Typeface

Another term for this brand element is “font,” but your designer will appreciate the correct use of words! When choosing a brand, it’s smart to choose a “family” of typefaces that will coordinate with each other so that you have matchy-matchy options for bold, italics, different letter “weights” (literally, how “light” or “heavy” they look), and so on.

Opt for readability over all else. There’s nothing like designing (what you think is) a perfect piece of advertising only to realize that it’s illegible because the flowery, scripted typeface you absolutely love can’t be read on a billboard from the ground.

Beyond readability, you might consider other typeface elements such as whether it has a serif or not (sans serif looks “cleaner,” but chunks of text tend to be more difficult to read); how “round” or “spiky” it is; how easy it is to change the size and conserve readability (your designer can likely help with this), and how widely available it is. Some typefaces and font families cost money to access and use, and if you’ll need to purchase the typeface for every designer’s machine that’s going to touch your brand, that’s something you’ll want to know before you fall in love with it.



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## Logos and logo elements

A logo is a selection of words or letters, icons or symbols, and color or typeface, all of which represents your brand in a nutshell. It takes a skilled designer to create a good logo; this isn't something you should consider whipping up yourself in PhotoShop unless you already have design skills to apply.

In many ways, a logo is your brand's "home base" and what you want to evoke every time somebody sees an ad or thinks about your brand. It's pretty common for a real estate logo to contain a house or a door or a key, and there's nothing wrong with the basics! But if you can think a little deeper about what those elements represent to you and what you want them to evoke in your clients—swiftness, and speed? Security and privacy? Luxury and indulgence?—then you might be able to include something that subtly triggers their needs and wants more than an image of a house.




If you're working with a franchisor, then your options for all of the above are going to be limited, but you may still be able to work within the color palette and brand guidelines of your franchisor, and create something that works well for your brokerage—including a brokerage-specific logo.

Generally speaking, you should not have just one single logo for your brand. It's going to appear in many different iterations, from a CMA to a banner on your website, and so it needs to be flexible and movable. A good designer will give you a few different shape and color options for a logo (square vs. rectangle, light vs. dark for different backgrounds) that you can then use on your website and in your advertising materials.

**You may even take the step of creating individual logos (that follow some kind of prescribed setup) for your agents, which allows them to brand themselves as unique and different while still affiliating them strongly with your brokerage.**

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## How do you use a brand?

We've said it before, and it bears repeating: **Consistency is how you get your brand to "stick" in a consumer's mind, and that means you'll need to put together some guidelines around how you use your brand as the broker, how designers should use your brand, and how agents can use your brand.**

That might sound like a lot of extra work, but you've probably already done most of it! Brand guidelines are simply a group of documents that explain what colors, typefaces, logos, and display options are permissible, and which ones are not. If you think of The Wall Street Journal's illustrated headshots instead of photographs, and imagine what kind of instructions the design editors give to their staff, then you're thinking in terms of brand guidelines.

You'll want to include your primary and secondary colors, the chosen fonts or typefaces, and logos that you use in your brokerage. You'll also want to include instructions on where those different things are expected to be used; for example, what an open-house sign should look like (if you have parameters around that), or which logo should be used for the top vs. bottom banner of your website.

**Ideally, you will be using your brand everywhere that a prospective client might encounter your company. This includes, but is not limited to:**

- Signage on your building or place of business
- Open house signs or "coming soon" signs in yards
- Your website (and all over your website!)
- Social media ads
- Other online ads
- Print advertising and mailers
- Swag

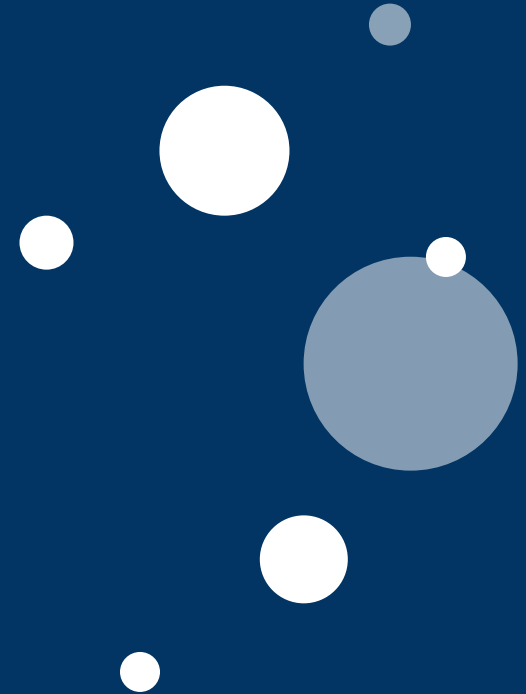
A good brand collects followers—it's entirely possible you'll have a group of fans who are dying to know when the next run of branded ballcaps is going to be ready. So don't ignore the swag; it's a great way to play with and promote your brand, as well as show your agents (and clients) a bit of love by giving it to them in the first place.

If you're not a branding expert, and this seems like a lot, don't panic! Many branding experts both in and outside of real estate will be willing to help you create a brand that resonates with you and your clients. Placester's consultants understand precisely how a brand works on a real estate website and can help you make those color palettes, typeface guidelines, and even logos that **genuinely reflect who you are and whom you serve**. If there's just one area, you'll want to take extra time to ensure you're setting yourself up for growth? **It's your brand.**

# Thank you!

Thanks for checking out “Building” vs “Scaling” -  
Brokerage Guide

For more insight into the world of real estate  
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